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AF/S FOR B. NEULING  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE, D. TEITELBAUM

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC ON MARCH ELECTIONS; FUTURE EFFORTS

Classified By: Ambassador Chris W. Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

11. (C) Summary: Over dinner on December 8, Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC leadership laid out their plans for contesting the March parliamentary elections, should they decide to participate. The Ambassador said the SADC countries appeared ready to bless the March elections regardless; Tsvangirai and his aides agreed. MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube argued that turning land reform against the GOZ could be a key not just to this election but to future elections as well. The Ambassador urged that the MDC get better organized for the long fight ahead to bring democracy to Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai argued that the West could best help by using

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the inevitable ZANU-PF overtures following the election rather than spinning them. Tsvangirai said he would carry that message to Washington in January, where a meeting with the President would be most welcome. End Summary.

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The March Elections and Beyond  
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12. (C) During a wide-ranging discussion with MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai at dinner December 8, Tsvangirai agreed with the Ambassador's observation that it was increasingly clear that SADC countries would bless the elections, regardless of the outcome or process. Tsvangirai added that the regional governments were showing signs of fatigue and wanted Zimbabwe normalized, something that would never happen until there was real reform. He said the MDC would make a final decision on whether to participate within the next two weeks. (Comment: It's increasingly clear the MDC will participate; SADC's stance leaves then no real option.) MDC Secretary General Welshman Ncube noted that the actual fraud would be less in the vote count than in the registration and delimitation (i.e., gerrymandering) processes going on now. The Ambassador suggested it was important to get non-governmental regional groups, such as trade unions, churches, and other elements of African civil society to observe the elections and issue their own assessments likely to counter-balance the SADC white-washing.

13. (C) During a discussion of land reform's impact on the election, Ncube said turning this issue against the government would be a key to MDC electoral success not only in this but in future elections as well. The precipitous decline in the agriculture sector had weakened the ZANU-PF since its base was with rural voters. The MDC had to develop a message that ZANU-PF's land reform had failed. First, it had destroyed productivity. Second, it had merely replaced a handful of large white commercial farmers with a handful of large black commercial farmers with close ties to the government. He thought this message could resonate with rural voters but that the MDC also needed a positive message to restore agricultural productivity and to move the issue beyond race.

14. (C) Tsvangirai agreed that rural voters had suffered disproportionately in the past three years from the regime's economic policies. He argued they were now more politically active than urban voters. The MDC could win their votes if it could overcome their fear of the ruling party. He suggested that one tactic would be to encourage rural voters to remain at the polling booths after voting and bear witness to the process. This could serve to limit fraud. In the cities, the MDC also had a difficult challenge: to inspire anew voters who had become cynical and apathetic as a result of two rigged elections and the survival of a regime that was destroying their standard of living. Tsvangirai regretted that the MDC's task was made immeasurably more difficult by its lack of access to the media, which put a premium on the MDC's ability to organize at the grass roots level and get out the vote.

15. (C) The Ambassador said this was exactly the right lesson to learn. The MDC had to accept that it was in a long-term fight and had to organize to win that fight. One suggestion, based on his recent trip to South Africa, was that the MDC assign working level operatives there to organize the Zimbabwean expatriate community. This sizeable community was a potential source not just of important political support

but of funding as well. These operatives could also coordinate and push civil society organizations in South Africa with an interest in Zimbabwe but that too often became distracted by other matters.

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ZANU-PF Party Congress  
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16. (C) The Ambassador asked for MDC views of the recently concluded ZANU-PF party congress. Tsvangirai said it had been a significant event. Mugabe had shown that he was absolutely determined to have his way on the presidential succession. However, the fallout from his heavy-handed tactics could be hard for him to manage. The choice of Joyce Mujuru as his successor was likely to increase ethnic friction within the party since she came from the same ethnic sub-group as Mugabe. If Mugabe failed to satisfy other clans within the Shona, Tsvangirai said anything was possible, including the disintegration of the ZANU-PF. He also suggested that moderate elements within the ZANU-PF, with whom the MDC could work, were in the ascendancy following the congress. Ncube disagreed, arguing that the extremists would remain in charge as long as Mugabe remained in charge.

17. (C) Tsvangirai speculated that Mugabe might be planning to turn the reins of government over to Mujuru in the near future, perhaps after the elections if ZANU-PF obtains a two-thirds majority and can amend the constitution at will. Mugabe would retain his position as President of ZANU-PF, allowing him to wield effective power while delegating to Mujuru the task of negotiating an end to Zimbabwe's political and economic crises with the opposition and the international community. Ncube was quick to disagree, suggesting that Mugabe would never voluntarily relinquish the presidency and would likely run in 2008. Both agreed, however, that Mujuru was genuinely popular, would be a formidable candidate and that the MDC had to tread carefully in attacking her.

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U.S. Trip  
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18. (C) Tsvangirai said he had had a successful trip to London in November where he had made a pitch that bashing all things ZANU was counter-productive. He was planning a trip to Canada and the U.S. for late January and would have a similar message. The West should be prepared for overtures from the GOZ and he recommended that we use those overtures to influence the regime rather than spurn them.

19. (C) Tsvangirai said his plan was to arrive in Washington a day or two after the inauguration. The Ambassador cautioned that this was usually a time of great turbulence in Washington and asked if the visit could be delayed a week. Tsvangirai said the parliamentary elections were likely to be

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in early to mid March and he and his team needed to be in Harare at least a month ahead of time. Given those conditions, he thought a trip the last week of January would work.

10. (C) The Ambassador suggested that Tsvangirai give some thought to whom he would want to see. The Ambassador recommended that Tsvangirai ask to see Secretary-designate Rice, NSC Hadley, and key Senators, Congressmen, and their staffs. Tsvangirai thought a meeting with President Bush would resonate positively and would demonstrate the depth of the U.S. commitment to democracy in Zimbabwe and Africa. The Ambassador said he would discuss the possibility of such a meeting with Washington.

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Comment  
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11. (C) We strongly support a meeting with the President and recommend it be discussed at the planned DC on Zimbabwe. Tsvangirai is for now the visible face of the democratic

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opposition in Zimbabwe and the signal such a meeting would send would be a powerful reaffirmation that while we are prepared to work with the Mugabe regime, our goal remains a stable multi-party democracy in Zimbabwe. In that regard, Ncube may be the more important interlocutor over time. He seems to have a better feel than Tsvangirai of the importance of better organizing the MDC: in effect making the transition from a mass movement to a broad-based political party.  
DELL